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Editorial

THE COMPETITION OF THE CLASSICS

The following communication has come to us from a friend of the classics who styles himself an "Outsider," meaning by that modest term, we suppose, that he is not professionally engaged in classical work. It does no good to hold, nor can we successfully maintain, that classical studies should continue to keep the place that they kept for centuries under the old curricula. They have their values, their very great values; and in this age of many voices clamoring for a hearing, voices of the practical, vocational, commercial, we need to give ear as well to the voice of the cultural, the ideal, the spiritual, lest, when we have gained all that the practical and the profitable can give us, we find that we have starved our souls and are no longer able to enjoy what our hands have gained for us. The constant danger to which we are exposed is that we set these two phases of life in conflict, whereas they should go hand in hand. The thoughtful scholar needs also studies that will fix his feet firmly on the ground; the too practical youth must also learn to dream dreams and to see visions.

But to return to our "Outsider," we are inclined to think that he overrates the classics in his zeal for them. We need make no claim for them as against science and things manual, or deplore the spread of these studies in the least. Let the classics make their own appeal. Our only fear need be that we teachers of the classics may not teach and present our subject worthily, so that it may have the fairest possible chance with our pupils. Following is the communication:

From a classical source comes the complaint that we no longer take down our Plato or our Horace for an evening's diversion, as in the olden time. No more, one may answer, do we turn to our Milton, our Goethe, or our Molière. In former times, when this was common—if it really was—it was the result of a curriculum so concentrated upon the classics that other subjects forced themselves with difficulty upon the learner's notice. The paucity of distracting

elements compelled the student to learn his Latin and his Greek, even though they were worse taught than they are today. In school, absence of competition from other subjects led these men to master their classics; out of school, absence of competition from the crowding interests of modern life left them free to indulge their leisure in that reading which they did best—and doing best, liked best—the perusal of the classics.

Then came a twofold change. In school the course was “enriched” by the introduction of the sciences—physics, chemistry, biology, zoölogy, physiology, botany, physiography, astronomy; of historical subjects, not only Greek and Roman history, but mediaeval, modern, English, American, civics, and economics; of manual training, with its many branches, from sloyd to forge work and mechanical drawing; of business courses, from bookkeeping to stenography and typewriting; and lastly, of agriculture. And with all these went an extension of English from the old half-year of “rhetoric” to the complete English course required of all students throughout the bulk of the curriculum. Outside, the school interests widened; the whole known world came into the stream of modern civilization; travel became easier and men traveled more; books, papers, and magazines multiplied, and art, science, and invention forced themselves from all parts of the world upon the students’ notice. With these widening interests came the demand that the cultured man should know not merely Latin and Greek, but also what is going on in the civilized world. To keep abreast of the times he had to know the work of Ibsen, Rodin, Koch, Pasteur, Kitchener, Togo, Roentgen, Edison, Marconi, the Wrights, and Zeppelin. And this forced Homer and Virgil upon the shelf.

And so we come to today. The entrance of the sciences upon a field almost entirely unoccupied by them thirty years ago, the advent of the business course, of manual training, of stenography, typewriting, and recently of agriculture in the public schools, and the introduction into the colleges of courses of business administration and schools of commerce have broadened the scope of modern education and offered opportunities to the students of today of which the classically trained men of the past never dreamed. In the good old times the people to whom the modern course in agriculture, manual training, and bookkeeping appealed secured their training on the farm or in the store. Now they go to school.

Nothing but the astounding vitality of the classics, a vitality based upon a wonderful record of usefulness and strengthened by a system of training which has been perfected during many years, could withstand competition such as this. For the classics *are withstanding* it. Side by side with the increase in richness of the secondary school and college curriculum, the classics have maintained their position, gaining in understanding and usefulness, as well as in the effectiveness with which they have been taught. They are today in better condition than ever before, are taught by better teachers, and are doing more good. Instead of being alarmed at the great increase in other subjects and at the enormous growth in the number of students taking these other subjects the classicists should rejoice that so many people are coming in contact with schools in which Latin is taught. Latin is gaining, but it is hopeless to expect—and Latin teachers would be the last ones to desire—that its gains should keep pace with the enormous increase in the number of students who are flocking to the public schools.